



*U.S. Coast Guard Aviation History*

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## **Douglas RD, RD-1, RD-2, RD-4 "Dolphin"**

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### **Information:**

The Coast Guard acquired 13 total of four different variants of the famous Douglas Dolphin. They began acquiring Dolphins soon after the prototype model, named *Sinbad*, was introduced in 1930. It had an all-metal hull with room for 8 passengers and two flight crewmen. It featured a plywood-covered cantilever wing similar to the Fokker model acquired by the Coast Guard during this time. The first example was powered by two tractor-fitted J-5C Wright engines with two Hamilton Standard fixed pitch propellers. It was purchased for \$31,500 in 1931 and was designated as RD for multi-engine transport, Douglas. It was delivered on 19 March 1931. It was not an amphibian but utilized beaching gear. The Coast Guard christened it *Procyon* and assigned it to Air Station Cape May, New Jersey. LCDR C. C. von Paulsen flew *Procyon* to its

new duty station. The Coast Guard soon after acquired two other Douglas RDs and were somewhat different than *Procyon* in that they were true amphibians and were powered by more powerful Wright engines. They were christened *Adhara* (designated as RD-2 and delivered in July, 1932) and *Sirius* (delivered 5 August 1932). *Procyon* was later converted to an amphibian configuration. The service acquired upgraded Dolphins in November, 1935, and these were officially designated as RD-4s.

According to Percy:

"The Douglas RD started as the Sinbad, going through some iterations before the final configuration was established. It appeared to be smaller and lighter than the later Dolphins. The U.S. Coast Guard aircraft register for 1933 shows the RD named *Procyon* CG-27 based at Cape May, New Jersey, and allocated the international radio call-sign 'NUMRG' and Coast Guard call-sign '24 G.'" Apparently this first production aircraft was delivered to the USCG in New York direct from the Douglas factory in February 1931. This was a flying-boat, not an amphibian. The RD-2 *Adhara* was delivered in July 1932, and in 1933 it was based at Gloucester, Massachusetts, with the international radio call-sign 'NUMRJ' and Coast Guard call-sign '24-J.' The RD-1 *Sirius* followed on 5 August 1932, being based at Miami, Florida in 1933 with international call-sign 'NUMRH' and Coast Guard call-sign '24 H.' The first RD-4 was not delivered until nearly three years later, on 20 February 1935. All four types were externally different in fuselage, engine and tail configuration. . . The U.S. Coast Guard aircraft were used extensively in search and rescue (SAR) missions and as flying lifeboats, often flying far out to sea from several air stations to rescue stricken mariners or seamen in need of urgent medical care to hospitals ashore. Upon U.S. entry into World War II in December 1941 the U.S. Coast Guard became part of the U.S. Navy and the surviving Douglas RDD-4's were assigned to security patrols along the United States seaboard." [pp. 169-172]

Name	Type	Official No.	Comm.	Comments/Disposition
<i>Procyon</i>	RD	27; 227/ V106	9 Mar 1931	Dismantled, 1937
<i>Sirius</i>	RD-1	28/ 128/ V109	5 Aug 1932	1939
<i>Adhara</i>	RD-2	29; 129; V111	July 1932	Mar 1937, crashed
<i>Spica</i>	RD-4	130; V125	Nov 1934	Jan 1943
<i>Mizar</i>	RD-4	131; V126	Feb 1935	Aug 1941, crashed
<i>Alloth</i>	RD-4	132; V127	Feb 1935	
<i>Vega</i>	RD-4	133; V128	Feb 1935	
<i>Deneb</i>	RD-4	134; V129	Mar 1935	
<i>Aldebaran</i>	RD-4	135; V130	Feb 1935	Aug 1935, crashed
<i>Rigel</i>	RD-4	136; V131	Mar 1935	Jul 1940
<i>Capella</i>	RD-4	137; V132	Apr 1935	Jun 1943
<i>Bellatrix</i>	RD-4	128; V133	Apr 1935	
<i>Canopus</i>	RD-4	129; V134	Apr 1935	Aug 1942

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**Photographs:**



Douglas RD-4; "One of the huge flying life boats of the U.S. Coast Guard Air Station at Biloxi, Miss., taxiing in the waters of the Bay of Biloxi, just before a flight over the Gulf of Mexico on patrol and rescue duties." Photo Number 35, no date. Photographer: Anthony V. Ragusin, Biloxi, Mississippi.



Douglas RD; Flying low over water, rear view; no caption/date/number; photographer unknown.



Douglas RD; "Douglas amphibian on patrol," (flying over water, overhead mid-fuselage view); no date; Bray Pictures Corporation Photo, Number 13A.



Douglas RD; Water take-off; no caption/number/date; photographer unknown.



Douglas RD-2 *Adhara*; No caption, profile view, port-side, on runway; 14 June 1932; Photo number 7-13-33N 3726 DOLPHIN; photographer unknown.



Douglas RD-2 *Adhara* radio arrangement; "Radio installation Coast Guard Patrol and Rescue Plane ADHARA. Main transmitter model T-19, 100 watts, emission A.C.C.W. telegraph, frequency range 285-600 Kc; high frequency trans-receiver, model T-20-1, CGR-45; transmitter 5-watts power, emission C.W. and voice, frequency range 2464-4050 Kc, receiver frequency model CGR-19-C radio direction finder, homing receiver, beacon receiver and communication receiver, frequency range 250-525 Kc., (installed in tail and arranged for remote control from operators position since above photograph taken). Frequency indicator, model CGR-57, crystal checked, frequency range 250-600, and 2800 to 8100 Kc (not shown)." 14 July 1932; Photo Number 5-3-34 3802 DOLPHIN; photographer unknown.



Douglas RD-4 Mizar; No caption/number/date; photographer unknown. Courtesy of Van R. Field.



Douglas RD-4 Mizar; No caption/number/date; photographer unknown. Courtesy of Van R. Field.





Douglas RD-4 in the New York City area; No caption/number/date; photographer unknown. Courtesy of Van R. Field.

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Arthur Percy, *U.S. Coast Guard Aircraft Since 1916* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), pp. 320-321.

Gordon Swanborough & Peter M. Bowers. *United States Navy Aircraft Since 1911* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990) (revised), pp. 432-435.

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